

write a great cover letter!



...think
like an
employer!



***What is the
“Think Like an Employer”
Series?***

Most people have many roles in their lives. You might be a student, a parent, an accident survivor or a world traveler.

These things might be very important to you. They might play a big part in the kind of work you look for. They might even be the reason why you are looking for work.

HOWEVER, when you are job-searching, you have a new role. To an employer, you are first and foremost a potential employee.

This series will help you play this new role well by understanding what employers need and want – in other words, by “thinking like an employer.”

Revised August 2008

What is a Cover Letter?

Cover letters are sent to an employer with your resume when you apply for a job. A good cover letter gets the employer's attention. It should make the employer want to read your resume to find out more about you.

A cover letter may be expected of you. For example, you need to have one if you want a job that involves writing or office work (e.g. an administrative assistant). Senior-level positions usually require one as well.

A great cover letter is always a good idea!

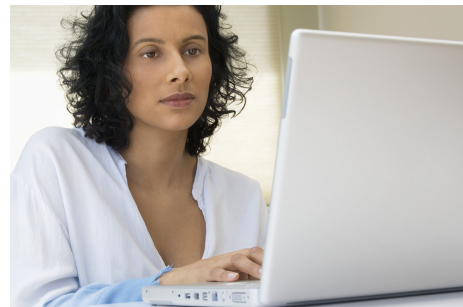
- For some jobs, a cover letter may not be necessary; however, it is still worth the effort to write one!
- Some employers believe the cover letter tells them more about the job seeker than their resume

What Makes a Cover Letter Great?

1. It states your interest in the company and the possible jobs that may be available. It should specifically state the details (i.e. how you found out about the job), if you are applying for an advertised position.

2. It gives some ideas about why you are a good fit for the job

It should help the employer see how your resume relates to the specific job or company, for example by listing important requirements of the job and how your skills and abilities match.



3. It makes a good first impression by being positive and easy to read, with useful information and no errors. Remember that your letter may be your very first contact with an employer.

4. It is targeted for each job. If at all possible, it should to be addressed to the specific individual who does the hiring for the company

Write a Great Cover Letter

1. Find out what the employer needs

Think about the jobs you would like to do. What skills, training and experience will your employer look for? Make a list.

Let's say you want to work with children. Some of the things you might list are:



What childcare workers do	Useful skills, experience and training
Keep children safe and healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- First aid and CPR- Health and safety training
Entertain children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Knowledge of games, songs, and activities- Experience working with groups of children- Patient, caring attitude
Teach children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Knowledge of how children grow and learn- ECE or other formal training
Work with parents and other daycare workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Strong communication skills- Being a positive, cooperative team member

Do some **research** to find out more information for your cover letter.

- Ask friends if they know anything about businesses in your area (for example, if you want to work with children, you could ask about daycare centres or children's programs)
- Check out company web pages or websites such as the Career Cruising (ask 2nd Chance staff for the URL and password)
- Look at company brochures, flyers etc.
- Look for descriptions of companies in an industrial, business or non-profit directory
- Use other sources of occupational information, such as job ads from the Service Canada Job Bank (www.jobbank.gc.ca), or job descriptions from the NOC (National Occupational Code) website (www23.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca)

Research Tip #1:

Try to find out useful information about specific employers. For example, maybe there's a daycare centre that really prides itself on being homey and friendly. If you apply there, you can add "warmth and friendliness" to your list of things they want in employees.



Research Tip #2:

If you have a job ad, read it carefully!

If an employer asks for something in an ad, and you have it, tell them in your cover letter!

You can also get good ideas for other cover letters: if one employer wants a particular skill, others probably do too!

2. See which of your skills, training and experience match up

Look at your resume. Pick out things that match your list from step one. These are the things you will mention in your cover letter.

Also try to think of things that match the list, but aren't on your resume. Maybe you cook for 24 people every Thanksgiving and have developed special recipes for your vegetarian aunt. A restaurant owner looking for kitchen help would probably value that experience.

3. Write your letter!

You can use the example on page 6 to help. When writing, make sure you mention the skills, training and experience that you thought of in step 2. And don't forget to think like an employer!



When you do this:	The employer thinks this:
Use good quality paper, envelopes, and printer (never handwrite it!)	Good, I can read this.
Show your knowledge of the company	This person is really interested and thorough
Include key skills	That's just what I was looking for!
Be brief and direct, never more than one page	I have time to read this – this person is efficient
Leave salary expectations out (unless it is asked)	I wonder what this person expects to be paid – I will have to ask them at the interview
Talk about your skills, not yourself (be careful not to use “I” too much)	This letter doesn't sound self-centred. It sounds like the person who wrote it cares about my company and how he can help us.
Use a name (instead of “dear sir”) and make sure it is spelled right. Never use “to whom it may concern.”	This letter is for me – better read it Or aha! This person took the time to find out – she is really conscientious
Show your knowledge of the position	This person knows what it takes, and he has it
Make it look nice <ul style="list-style-type: none">• use matching format for cover letters and resumes• don't cram too much on one page	This looks easy to read – and this person is a tidy, professional type
Be careful <ul style="list-style-type: none">• sign and date your letter• check for spelling and grammar errors• make sure you are sending it to the right place and the right person	This person is a mature, professional person

4. Keep and recycle your letter

If you keep your letter, then you know what you have said to a particular employer. If they offer you an interview, you know that they liked what they read – and you can say more of the same kinds of things.



As well, if you apply for a similar job at another company, you don't have to write a whole new letter. You can use the one you just wrote, with a few changes. Take out anything that doesn't match what the new employer would need or want. Add in anything that does match.

5. Learn more about cover letters

A 2nd Chance staff person can look over your letters and give you advice on improving them. To find out the nearest 2nd Chance location, call (519) 823-2440 (in Guelph) or 1-800-478-0961 (in the county), or visit www.2ndchance.ca.

You can also find sample cover letters and tips in the following books (available at a 2nd Chance location or through the public library) and websites:

Gallery of Best Resumes (also has cover letters) by David F. Noble

Cover Letters that Knock 'Em Dead by Martin Yate

Perfect Resume Strategies: 75 Success Stories of Real People in Times of Change – The Resumes, Cover Letters and Strategies They Used
By Tom and Ellen Jackson

www.monster.ca has excellent samples in its resume centre

www.worksearch.gc.ca

Your name, address, telephone number and postal code should be at the top of the page. It should look the same as on your resume.

IMA FAKE

910 Eleven Street, Guelph, Ontario, 1A1 B2B 519-123-4567

Current date

March 25, 2008

Manager's name (who makes the hiring decision)

Peter Piper
Production Manager
Pickled Peppers Company
45 Peck Avenue
Guelph, Ontario N1A B2C
Fax: (519) 987-6543

Full name and address of company, plus fax # if faxing

Use full name – if you can't find out, use "Hiring Manager" or "Human Resources." Never use "to whom it may concern" or "dear sir or madam."

Attention Peter Piper:

First: indicate why you are writing (e.g. where you saw the job). Note your skills.

With 10 years experience in machine operation, I am very interested in your opening for a Machine Operator, as advertised on the Service Canada Job Bank, Thursday, March 23, 2008.

My hands-on knowledge of working on a production line includes working safely as a machine operator. In addition, I possess the following skills:

- Accurately maintain related invoices and work orders
- Meet and exceed company quotas
- Maintain a clean and safe work station

Next: why you're the best for the job

Your company has been providing pickled peppers to the Wellington region for over 30 years. You have grown from a small family-run business to a manufacturing facility with over 100 employees. I would be a proud member of your team.

Show the employer you know their company

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to meeting with you to further discuss my qualifications and how I can assist the Pickled Peppers Company.

Yours sincerely,

Always thank them and suggest an interview

Ima Fake

Ima Fake

Don't forget to sign your name!